

Message Text

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EXDIS

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SUBJECT: SHAH'S COMMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN, INDIA, AND PAKISTAN

REFS: (A) TEHRAN 2654 (B) ISLAMABAD 2670 (C) STATE 071657

SUMMARY: WE THINK THE DEPT IS CORRECT IN JUDGING THAT INDIAN CONCERN OVER ITS RELATIONS WITH IRAN INTRODUCES SOME RESTRAINT INTO INDIA'S REACTIONS TO CENTO ACTIVITIES AND EVEN TO OUR ARMS POLICY DECISION. BUT THERE ARE LIMITS TO HOW FAR IRUVIAN ECONOMIC POLICY CAN GO IN EFFECTING INDIAN POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON ISSUES WHICH ARE OF INTENSE DOMESTIC CONCERN HERE. AS WE HAVE OURSELVES FOUND IN DEALING WITH THE INDIANS, THEY ARE AT TIMES PREPARED TO CUT OFF THEIR ECONOMIC NOSE TO SPITE THEIR PRESUMED SECURITY AND POLITICAL FACE WHERE PAKISTAN IS CONCERNED. END SUMMARY.

1. THE INDIAN MILITARY AND CONSERVATIVE INDIAN STRATEGISTS STILL SEE IRAN AS A POTENTIAL "ENEMY" IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND ARE WARY OF ITS GROWING MIGHT. IF THE SHAH SEES THE NEED TO BUILD HIS DEFENSES AGAINST ANY EVENTUALITY (REF. A), THE INDIAN NAVY AND OTHER INDIAN SERVICES ARGUE FROM THE SAME PREMISES TO THE SAME CONCLUSION. IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, WE SUSPECT THAT INDIANS WOULD LIKE TO ENVISAGE PAKISTAN AS A BUFFER BETWEEN INDIA AND IRAN IN MUCH THE SAME WAY AS THE

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SHAH WOULD. PARTICULARLY AS IRANIAN POWER HAS GROWN IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, INDIA HAS FOCUSED MORE ON DEFLECTING IRANIAN

INTEREST FROM PAKISTAN TO INDIA IN THE SUBCONTINENT. THE INDIANS MAY HAVE HOPED FOR A TIME THEY WERE ACHIEVING SOME SUCCESS TOWARD THIS END, BUT NOW WE SUSPECT THEY ARE WONDERING AGAIN. ULTIMATELY THE KEY QUESTION MAY BE WHETHER THE CENTO ALLIANCE WHICH LINKS PAKISTAN AND IRAN IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH THE TYPE OF INDO-IRANIAN-PAK RELATIONSHIP THE INDIANS ENVISAGE AS OPTIMAL IN THE AREA.

2. WHILE INDIANS ARE STILL LOATHE TO OPENLY CRITICIZE THE SHAH, THEY ARE CLEARLY UNHAPPY AT WHAT THEY ALSO SEE AS A "REVIVAL" OF CENTO (FORMER FONMIN SWARAN SINGH'S WORD IN RESPONDING TO A QUESTION IN PARLIAMENT ON MIDLINK EXERCISES LAST NOVEMBER), CONCERNED THAT THE END OF THE US ARMS EMBARGO WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR IRAN TO PROVIDE MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO PAKISTAN, AND UNCERTAIN ABOUT FUTURE INDO-IRANIAN RELATIONS.

3. FONMIN CHAVAN'S SPEECH TO THE NON-ALIGNED COORDINATION BUREAU MEETING IN HAVANA, MARCH 24, INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING UNSPECIFIC BUT UNMISTAKABLE SENTENCES: "THE INDUCTION OF ARMS INTO THE COUNTRIES BELONGING TO MILITARY ALLIANCES IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD IS A GRAVE DEVELOPMENT. THE FLOW OF SUCH ARMS IS A MATTER OF DEEP CONCERN AND CANNOT BUT RETARD THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZATION AND RELAXATION OF TENSION IN OUR AREA." WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THE INDIANS HAVE CONVEYED THEIR CONCERNS TO THE IRANIANS. OUR INQUIRIES AT THE TIME OF MIDLINK REVEALED THAT THE INDIANS HAD CAREFULLY AVOIDED EXPRESSING ANY INDIGNATION EITHER TO THE TURKS OR IRANIANS. PRIVATELY INDIANS APPEARED TO FEEL THEY HAD LITTLE IF ANY LEVERAGE TO USE ON IRAN AND DID NOT WISH TO SOUR INDO-IRANIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

4. AT SOME POINT, HOWEVER, THE INDIANS MAY FEEL THEY MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN MORE OVERT CRITICISM OF IRAN FOR ITS ARMS MERCHANDISING AND STOCKPILING (LAST SEEN IN THE INDIAN PRESS IN 1973) AND THEIR RESTRAINED POLICY IN DEALING WITH IRAN SINCE 1974. DESPITE THE ATTRACTION OF THE SHAH'S OIL AND MONEY, WE ARE FAR FROM CONFIDENT THAT THESE LURES WILL WIN OUT OVER DOMESTIC POLITICAL PRESSURES SHOULD THE GOI

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BECOME CONVINCED THE PAKS WERE BENEFITTING DIRECTLY MILITARILY FROM AID FROM IRAN.

5. A STRONG VEIN OF DISTRUST OF IRAN (AND THE SHAH) RUNS IN SOME INDIAN INTELLECTUALS AND OFFICIALS WHO STILL ASK, WITH LITTLE URGING, WHY THE SHAH NEEDS ALL THOSE WEAPONS AND WHAT HE IS GOING TO DO WITH HIS NAVAL BASE AT CHAH BAHAR. DESPITE ACCELERATING RECRUITMENT OF INDIAN DOCTORS AND ENGINEERS TO WORK IN IRAN, INDIAN OIL PURCHASES, IRAN'S UNDERWITING OF THE KUDREMUKH IRON ORE PROJECT IN

INDIA, AND IRANIAN INTEREST IN A FEW OTHER SMALLER INDIAN INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS, INDO-IRANIAN RELATIONS ARE INTELLECTUALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY THIN. ONE RARELY SEES ARTICLES ABOUT IRAN IN THE INDIAN PRESS OR ENCOUNTERS INDIANS WHO KNOW OR CARE MUCH ABOUT IRAN.

6. WE BELIEVE THE INDIANS ARE SERIOUS IN SEEING "REVITALIZED" CENTO ACTIVITY (ISLAMABAD 2646) AS ADVERSE TO INDIAN INTERESTS. THE LARGEST NAVAL EXERCISE IN 10 YEARS IN NOVEMBER AND A CENTO MEETING IN APRIL ATTENDED BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE US JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, BOTH FOCUSED ON PAKISTAN, FEED SUSPICIONS OF LURKING PAK-IRANIAN PLANNING AGAINST INDIA. ALL THIS RUNS COUNTER TO THE OBJECTIVE OF THE SHAH'S DIPLOMACY IN THE SUBCONTINENT WHICH REF C PRAISES. SAXBE

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